

Drawn to sex

Erika Moen lays it all out on the story board in the sex-positive world of comics

BY SUE ZALOKAR
STAFF WRITER

Erika Moen is a Portland based illustrator and cartoonist, who also happens to be really fascinated by sex. Moen and her husband of six years, Matt Nolan, began the wildly popular web comic, "Oh Joy Sex Toy" (OJST). Essentially the duo provide a comic formatted review of sex toys and sex positive topics.

Moen, who proudly claims years of extensive field research in matters of consensual, pleasurable sex, draws the wildly popular webcomic which releases each Tuesday on her website, ohjoysextoy.com.

Moen plans to release a hard copy of the first year of the "Oh Joy Sex Toy" comics in tandem with new comics created specifically for the OJST Book. Moen and Nolan are self-publishing the 268-page project. The book should be available in November on the OJST website.

She will be at the Rose City Comic Con at the Oregon Convention Center, September 20-21 and will be tabling with Periscope Studio. She will have copies of her autobiographical comic DAR! series available for sale, which will soon fall out of print. She has the last few copies left and when they're gone, they're gone. Moen will also have an advance copy of the OJST book to show off.

She recently returned from some international travel, and I asked her about her trip.

Erika Moen: Um, well, I got hit by a car.

Sue Zalokar: What?

E.M.: Yep. With my settlement, my husband and I went to go visit his family in England.

S.Z.: Let's back up though. You were hit by a car?

E.M.: I was a bicyclist in a crosswalk. I bike every single day, but I'm really cautious. I know lanes of traffic don't all stop, so I don't know how this happened. I poked out and it looked clear, so I started to go out – very slowly, I wasn't moving fast at all – it was walking speed for sure. There wasn't a car, and then there just was a car. It's a miracle, but he happened to hit me in such a way that I didn't break any skin. But I didn't get hurt! I went into shock immediately and I was shaking so hard that somebody else had to help me call my husband. I was shaking so hard somebody else had to dial for me.

I definitely was hit by a car, but I didn't have a scrape on me.

So, if you ever want to take an international trip, you just have to cross Powell Boulevard.

S.Z.: You've been making comics and putting them online for 16 years – over half of your life. How did you start drawing?

E.M.: I always kind of drew the same way that all kids draw. Comics always appealed to me. Not just specifically comics, but picture books as well. I could just spend hours going over the exact same books as a kid.

My dad had this giant hardback book – it

was just huge, you could smoosh a toddler with it – called "The Smithsonian Collection of Turn of the Century Sunday Comics." Or Sunday Funnies, maybe? I don't remember exactly, but it was all the classic comics from way back in the day. I would spend hours just going over it.

I really loved drawing for a really long time. I kind of lost it for the last few years, but I'm getting it back... I've been enjoying drawing. And I do love making comics. Comics have this unique ability to communicate difficult or complex subjects in this really easy to digest way. And controversial subjects as well.

S.Z.: There are stylistic distinctions between Erika Moen drawings and non Erika Moen drawings. How has your style evolved in the time you have been drawing?

E.M.: Since I've been drawing OJST, I've been trying really hard to simplify my lines. I know even in the very first strips, it's simple. It's cartoony. But as I'm going on, I'm trying to eliminate every superfluous line. And really get it down to the essence of conveying information in a single line.

The reason why I have a limited color palette, and if you look at all of my comics over the last 16 years, they almost all have a very limited color palette, is because I'm scared of color.

It takes a good eye and artistic training to know how to put together all of these different colors and not have it look like, as my friend Dylan McConis likes to say, it looks like vegetable soup. I like to choose one tone and three shades of one tone and then just work with that.

S.Z.: You pretty much built a college

curriculum for yourself and then made your passion into your art and trade. For those of our readers who may not have followed your autobiographical comic, DAR!, or may not be familiar with your current project, the wildly popular, "Oh Joy Sex Toy," can you tell me about how you came to identify as a sex educator?

E.M.: I don't identify as a sex educator.

S.Z.: Really? Because that is how you are portrayed. I've even heard you refer to yourself as a sex educator.

E.M.: I'm making a distinction that nobody else will give a damn about and really, in the grand scheme of things, it doesn't mean anything. But, I see myself as a cartoonist who does comics about sex education. Again, a subtle distinction – but an important one.

I think the whole world of sex is incredibly fascinating. I'm a hobbyist. I'm not trained, I'm not a professional, I'm not an expert.

S.Z.: Shall we talk about sex education for our youth?

E.M.: It's appalling.

S.Z.: Yes. But fifth graders don't necessarily need to know about butt plugs yet, so how ...

E.M.: They do need to know about pleasure. It is left out of our sex ed (curriculum). However in our culture, pleasure for men – I'm going to be sexist. Right now I'm just gonna talk about cis gender stuff.

Men, we are taught in our culture, men want sex. We know sex must feel good for

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Erika Moen in her studio